

Description

PROTECTION AND TAMPER NOTIFICATION DEVICE FOR USE WITH A VALVE

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Cross-Reference to Related Application

This application claims priority from U.S. provisional application no. 60/456,895, filed March 21, 2003.

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Field of the Invention

The invention relates, in general, to fluids stored in tanks and, in particular, to a device for notification of tampering, and prevention of particulate contamination of fluid stored in tanks.

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Background Art

Industrial fluid is commonly stored in cylinders or tanks and is supplied to fluid distribution systems used in various industries through connections to the cylinders. Fluid distribution systems include devices to regulate or distribute gas, and pipe or tubing connecting the devices in the distribution system. The fluid cylinders typically have, or are connected to, a valve connectable to the distribution system for transfer of fluid from the cylinder to the fluid distribution system.

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The valve fitting(s) used to connect the cylinder to the distribution system is often susceptible to particulate contamination as contaminants may find their way into the fitting. Thus, when a connection is made between the fluid distribution system and the fitting, particles in the fitting likely enter into the distribution system as a connection is made. This may jeopardize the integrity of the fluid being distributed and may have devastating consequences in the industry.

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Plugs, known in the art, are used to plug up or cap the fitting before a connection is made to the fluid distribution system such that at least some particles are prevented from collecting in the fittings. Therefore, it is less likely that contamination of the fluid will occur upon connection of the tank with the fluid distribution system. However, the size of a fitting connected to each cylinder may vary. Therefore, multiple sizes of plugs are required to properly plug up or cap the different sized fittings. Further, fittings include threads for connection to the fluid distribution systems. In some fittings the threads are located on an outside surface, while in other fittings the threads are located on an inside surface of the fitting.

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a protection mechanism that will protect several different sizes and types of fittings.

In many situations, the fluids stored within the cylinder are utilized in medical and food and beverage applications. Contamination of fluids used in these situations may have negative health and safety implications. Therefore, it is important to be able to determine whether a party had access to the valve fitting connected to the tank and was thus presented with an opportunity to dispense fluid from the cylinder or, to perhaps even tamper with the fluid within the cylinder or the valve. Further, it is important to be able to determine or to be notified of whether an opportunity for particulate contamination of the fitting arose.

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a notification device.

Summary of the Invention

These and other objectives have been achieved by a protection and tamper notification device having a fitting block, such as a tapered cylinder with a base,

receivable by or capable of receiving a valve fitting,
attached to and disposed between a first strap and a
second strap. The straps are bendable about the valve
which is connectable to a fluid tank and are fastenable
5 to each other upon enclosing the valve. In order to
access the valve fitting, the enclosure must be broken or
otherwise compromised. The compromised enclosure
provides notification that the valve was made accessible
and that the fluid within the tank and/or the fitting may
10 have been accessed or tampered with or that the fitting
may have been exposed to contaminants. In one
embodiment, the blocking means may include a plug of the
prior art.

In one embodiment, the first strap includes a
15 ring through which a burst disk of a valve is insertable.
When the device enclosing the valve has been compromised
so that the blocking means may be removed from the
fitting, the device likely remains on the valve because
the burst disk remains inserted within the ring of the
20 first strap, and provides notification that the valve was
made accessible or exposed and that the fluid within the
tank and/or the fitting may have been accessed or
tampered with. Notification of fitting exposure or of
access or attempted access to a fitting, such as a valve
25 fitting connected to a fluid tank, is desired to prevent
negative health or safety implications that may result
from contamination or tampering.

The tapered cylinder with a base is used as a
means for preventing particulate contamination of a
30 fitting, on its own, and in conjunction with the
protection and tamper notification device described
above. The tapered cylinder includes securing means on
an outer surface and on an inner surface. In one
example, the securing means are threads. The tapered
35 cylinder has threads on the outside, so it may be
threaded into a valve fitting having threads on the

inside. The valve fitting acts as a receiver of the tapered cylinder. Further, because the tapered cylinder has threads on the inside, it may act as a receiver. The tapered cylinder may be threaded about the valve fitting having threads on the outside.

In another example, the tapered cylinder includes tangs on an outer and on an inner surface as securing means. The tapered cylinder with tangs on the outside may be pushed into a valve fitting. The tangs of the cap act as a receiver of the thread of the valve fitting, similar to how the tangs of a milk cap receive a thread of a milk bottle. The tapered cylinder with tangs on the inside may be pushed over a valve fitting, the tangs on the inner surface receiving the thread of the valve fitting.

Additionally, the tapered surface/sides of the cylinder allow fittings of various sizes to be threadably received by the tapered cylinder and allow the cylinder to be threaded into fittings of various sizes. This is an improvement over plugs of the prior art, where various sized plugs were required to plug fittings of various sizes. It can be said that the tapered cylinder acts a universal blocking means for fittings. A variety of different sizes of tapered cylinders may be used in the present invention.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a protection and tamper notification device of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 1 receiving a fitting.

Fig. 3 is a perspective view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 1 received within a fitting.

Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 1 in a fastened position.

5 Fig. 5a is a top view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 1.

Fig. 5b is a side view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 5a.

Fig. 5c is a bottom view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 5b.

10 Fig. 5d is a partial side view of the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 5c.

Fig. 5e is a side view of a tapered cylinder shown in the protection and tamper notification device of Fig. 1.

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Detailed Description of the Invention

With reference to Fig. 1, there is shown a protection and tamper notification device 32 of the present invention featuring a fitting block which is, in one example, a cylinder 20 having tapered sides 30 and a base 22 (Figs. 5a and 5c). It can be said that the tapered cylinder with the base is a thimble, as it may be shaped similarly to a thimble having tapered sides. In operation, the tapered cylinder 20 is threaded or pushed into or about a fitting, such as valve fitting 26 or 28 (Figs. 3 and 2). Where the fitting block is a plug, of the prior art, the plug is inserted within or about the fitting 26 or 28. The fitting block prevents at least some particles, such as dust, from entering the fitting and from potentially contaminating fluids from a fluid cylinder or tank (not shown) in connection with the fitting 26 or 28. Fitting 26 and fitting 28 are each typically connected to a fluid distribution system (not shown) when fluid dispensation is desired. The invention will be described below with regard to the tapered

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cylinder 20, however other fitting blocks may be utilized with the device 32.

Referring to Figs. 1 and 4, the protection and tamper notification apparatus 32 further includes

5 bendable or flexible straps 34a and 34b. Strap 34a has a tongue 36 with a saw edge 37 and strap 34b has a tongue housing 38. Straps 34a and 34b may be integral or separate. The tongue 36 is received within the tongue housing 38 upon enclosing of valve 48. The straps 34 are
10 bent at bendable portions 40 (Fig. 4) about valve 48 (Figs. 2 and 3). In one example, the bendable portion 40 may include an indentation or channel 42 or a series of indentations or channels 42 within the straps 34 that facilitate the bending of the straps and/or provide the
15 user with a selection of locations in which the straps will bend relatively easily. The straps may comprise, for example, a bendable plastic or rubber material. When bent at appropriate sections, the straps 34 form a fence 44 (Fig. 4), which may be square shaped, around valve 48
20 (Figs. 2 and 3) connected to the fluid cylinder or tank. The fluid cylinder (not shown) is typically attached to valve base 46. A front portion of the fence 44 includes a wall 52 on one side of the tapered cylinder 20 that may or may not include channels 42, and a portion of the
25 tongue receiver 38 on the other side of the tapered cylinder. A left side portion of the fence 44 includes a wall 54 featuring a tab 56 with perforations 58 on either side of the tab 56 down the height of the wall 54. A rear portion of the fence includes a needle eye portion
30 60, including a ring 61 and an extended base 65, in the strap 34a. The needle eye 60 is large enough to allow a burst disk 62 (Figs. 2 and 3) on another end of valve 48 to be received within the ring. A right side portion of the fence includes a wall 53, and tongue housing 38,
35 through which the saw edged tongue 36 is insertable so that the valve 48 is fenced in within opening 67. The

tongue 36 is inserted within the tongue housing 38 in a direction indicated by arrow A locking the apparatus.

Upon attempts to remove the tongue 36, in a direction indicated by arrow B, saw edges 37 of the tongue 36 contact and press against various protrusions 62 of the tongue receiver 38. Therefore removal of the tongue is prevented. Another strap locking or fastening mechanism besides the tongue and tongue receiver may be used.

Before access to the fitting is provided so that the fitting may be made available for connection and fluid communication with the fluid distribution system, the tapered cylinder 20 must be removed from the fitting. In order to remove the tapered cylinder 20 from the fitting, the tamper protection and notification apparatus 32 must somehow be removed. A party is prevented from removing the tongue 36 from the tongue receiver 38 without breaking, cutting, or otherwise compromising the strap 34 or other portions of the device 32. The apparatus 32 is secured tightly about the valve 48 therefore may not be lifted and removed. Also, the locking mechanism is intended to prevent a user from removing the tamper notification apparatus 32, including the tapered cylinder 20, by way of unlocking the lock, without compromising the device. Therefore, the protection and tamper notification apparatus 32 would typically be removed by cutting through the tamper notification apparatus 32. It may be cut by pulling down on the tab 56 at the perforations 58 thus breaking the strap 34a and allowing for removal of the tapered cylinder 20. It may be compromised with other methods. Once the tamper notification apparatus is compromised, a party will be made aware that the fitting 26 or 28 was made available for connection with the fluid distribution system, and thus will be put on notice that fluid from the cylinder may have actually or potentially been

dispensed or otherwise tampered with or that the valve itself, including the fitting, may have been tampered with and at the very least exposed to particles.

5 The compromised device 32 may serve as proof that the valve 48 and/or the fluid within the fluid cylinder was made accessible and possibly tampered with.

10 Further, where the device 32 includes the ring 61 through which burst disk 62 is inserted, the device will typically remain on the valve 48, serving as evidence that the device was compromised and that the valve 48 and/or the fluid within the fluid cylinder was made accessible and possibly tampered with.

15 Referring to Figs. 2, 3, and 5a-5e, the tapered cylinder 20 will be described in more detail. The tapered cylinder 20 may be utilized in conjunction with the device 32 or separately from the device 32. The tapered cylinder has sides 30 tapering to a base 22 and securing means 24 disposed on an outer surface 31 and on an inner surface 33 of the tapered cylinder. In one example, the securing means include a pair of tangs that receive a thread on the valve fitting. In another example, the securing means include threads. As stated above, the tapered cylinder includes a base 22. The base 22 acts as a block preventing at least some particles from entering the fitting. The tapered cylinder 20 may comprise, for example, plastic, metal, or other desired material. If the tapered cylinder has threads on the outer surface, it may be threaded into a fitting 26 having threads on an inner surface (not shown). If the tapered cylinder has tangs 24 on the outer surface it may be pushed into valve fitting 26 having threads on an inner surface to receive the threads. For example, tangs may receive one or more thread from the valve fitting. For example, a space between a pair of tangs receives a thread. In these examples (Fig. 3), the fitting 26 acts as a receiver for the tapered cylinder.

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Further, because the tapered cylinder 20 has threads or tangs on the inside, the tapered cylinder may act as a receiver, and the tapered cylinder may be threaded about a fitting 28 (Fig. 2) having threads on the outside or alternatively, if tangs are present on an inner surface, the tapered cylinder may be pushed over the valve fitting so that a valve fitting thread may be received by the tangs. In the tang embodiment, one thread may be received by one pair of tangs. Other securing means may be used to secure the tapered cylinder to the valve fitting.

Additionally, the tapered sides 30 of the tapered cylinder 20 allow fittings of various sizes to be threaded into or to receive the tapered cylinder 20. For example, if the fitting is of the type having threads or tangs on the outside (fitting 28, Fig. 2) and having a relatively small size or diameter as compared to the tapered cylinder diameter at its largest point, fitting 28 will be received at a relatively deep position within the tapered cylinder 20, as compared to a larger fitting. If the fitting is of a relatively large size it will not be threaded as deep within the tapered cylinder, as compared to a fitting having a smaller size.

Conversely, if the fitting is of a type having threads or tangs on the inside (fitting 26, Fig. 3), and if the fitting is relatively large with a large diameter, the tapered cylinder 20 will be threaded relatively deep into the fitting 26 as compared to where the fitting is relatively small.

Cylinder 20 surfaces, including the base 22, prevent at least some particles, such as dust, from entering the fitting 26 or 28, thus protecting the fitting. With reference to Fig. 3, particles enter the cylinder 20 while the base 22 and inner surface 33 act as a block preventing at least some particles from entering the fitting 26. With reference to Fig. 2, the cylinder

20 surrounds or caps the fitting so that the base and
outer surface 31 prevent at least some of the particles
from entering the fitting 28. Therefore, the tapered
cylinder 20 may be used to protect fittings of various
5 sizes and designs, and to subsequently protect fluid
dispensed through the fittings, from particulate
contamination.